

Ailing brass players aided by Vander Kolk-Shulman-Fedderly Trio

In what can only be described as a nightmarish 180-degree turnaround in one's playing abilities, brass instrument-related injuries have plagued musicians, both amateur and professional, for years, typically leaving them incapacitated for good - until now. The recently formed Vander Kolk-Shulman-Fedderly Trio of Baltimore offers a unique three-pronged approach to diagnosing, treating, and rehabbing injured players. Having previously treated injured players independently with much success, the three were familiar with each other's services and met to discuss forming a cohesive team in which their individual areas of expertise would complement each other, expediting the often-harrowing process of seeking out professional help in overcoming lip injuries.

In meeting with the trio, patients first consult with Dr. Craig Vander Kolk, plastic surgeon at Mercy Medical Center, who assesses the damage and determines whether there is a need for surgery, which is typically not required. Formerly having treated children with cleft palates, Dr. Vander Kolk is well-versed in operating on the lip muscle and repairs muscles that have been torn or herniated by brass players. From there, patients continue to navigate the road to recovery by undergoing physical therapy and injury-prevention sessions with the joint assistance of David Shulman and David Fedderly, respectively. Shulman, proprietor of Shulman & Associates Physical Therapy in Towson, has treated various music-related injuries since 1986 and teamed up with the Baltimore Symphony's Principal Tubist, David Fedderly, to better understand the mechanics behind playing brass instruments. A firm believer that "a warm muscle is a happy muscle," Shulman provides patients with therapeutic procedures, including massages of the face muscles, ultrasound application, and electric stimulation in order to keep muscles loose and supple. According to Shulman, players become overly preoccupied with "chasing sound," leaving their lips subject to injury as a result of overuse and inefficient use of intraoral (occurring inside the mouth) air pressure, which is where Fedderly takes the reigns. A former student of the inimitable tubist/pedagogue Arnold Jacobs, Fedderly has a vast understanding of how to counsel players on maximizing efficiency of air use, for which he employs the use of breathing exercises and devices to reveal how well players release air into their instruments in addition to offering advice on practice habits that will be conducive to long-term preservation of the muscles. Shulman asserts that

alternating practice sessions with rest in blocks of 20-30 minutes is the safest way to play.

In addressing the evolution of healing injured brass players, Shulman cites that effective treatment is in the “orphan stages,” and that players of the past, including Louis Armstrong, were forced to utter the words “I lost my chops” with the knowledge that they had reached the end of their careers.

These days are no more, and as medical technology advances, the trio hope to incorporate the use of newer, more accurate soft tissue MRIs and a tool called the stroboscope, a device used to analyze high-speed motions and vibrations at a slower rate, in order to study the effects that overuse and over-pressurized playing can have on the vibration of the lips.

Having officially formed only 4 months ago, the Vander Kolk-Shulman-Fedderly trio have seen patients from Baltimore, New York City, Indiana, and New Orleans, enabling them to return successfully to their careers.

As noted above, treatment begins with an assessment by Dr. Craig Vander Kolk, followed by joint appointments with David Shulman and David Fedderly. Below is contact information for each specialist.

Dr. Craig Vander Kolk

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David Shulman

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David Fedderly

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